(c) the norms fixed for re-export of cigarettes?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) As per the Import Policy, cigarettes (IT CHS Code 24.02) fall under Restricted List of items. No proposal has been received for allowing import of cigarettes for the purpose of re-export. Under the Duty Exemption Scheme, there are no norms where import of cigarettes is allowed for re-export of cigarettes.

DEPB rates

2337. SHRI S. AGNIRAJ: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the total number of applications pending for fixation of DEPB rates as on date;

(b) whether it is a fact that exporters are not getting any benefit due to the delay in fixing DEPB rates;

(c) whether it is also a fact that due to stringent guidelines many small exporters are not able to get the rates fixed for these items; and

(d) if so, what steps are being taken to improve the system?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Fixation of DEPB rates is a continuous process. As on date, 68 applications are pending for fixation of rates.

(b) All exporters are not covered by the DEPB scheme. For cases which are not covered by this scheme, two other alternative schemes are available, namely, the Duty Drawback Scheme and the Advance Licensing Scheme, under which duty relief is provided to the exporters.

(c) and (d) The guidelines are not stringent. A standard procedure to be followed for deciding the DEPB rates is laid down under para 7.25 of the Exim Policy, 1997—2000 and Appendix 52 of the Handbook of Procedure Vol. 1, 1997—2000 as amended.

Fall in export of Pharmaceuticals

2338. MISS MABEL REBELLO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the fall in export of pharmaceuticals by Rs. 200 crores is due to non-issuance of N.O.C. by the Ministry of Health;

(b) if so, whether Government have fixed responsibilities of the officers concerned; and

(c) if so, the names and designations of the officers and action taken against them?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Trade Deficit

2339. SHRI SITARAM KESRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the trade balance deficit has gone up from $ 5.6 billion in 1997-98 to $ 6.7 billion in 1998-99 having an adverse impact on the national economy;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps Government have already taken or proposed to be taken to improve the position?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) As per the provisional data received from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCI&S), the trade deficit during 1997-98 was to the tune of US $ 6799 million. During April-October, 1998-99 the trade deficit has been estimated as US $ 5797 million.

(b) The trade deficit is measured by excess of imports over exports. There has been a show down in export growth and an increase in imports especially that of gold & silver.

(c) Export promotion measures are continously being taken by the Government through changes in policies and procedures for providing an export friendly environment, involvement of States in export promotion and consultation with trade and industry. A number of steps have been taken to promote exports which include lowering of interest rates on export credit, reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation and simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions. The Government is according high priority to exports and all necessary steps are being taken to put exports on high growth trajectory.

Gujarat as a Business Centre

2340. SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL. Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "Canada identifies Gujarat for business", published in the Ahmedabad edition of the Times of India, dated the 20th November, 1998;

(b) if so, the details and facts thereof; and

(c) the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) As indicated in the press, Canadian companies participated in the INTECHMART—Investment and Technology Market—Gujarat 98 organised by the Union Ministry of Industry in cooperation with UNIDO, Government of Gujarat and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) from December 4—6, 1998 in Ahmedabad. The main objectives were to identify and bring together potential foreign investors and partners from Gujarat to explore possibilities for joint collaborations, overseas companies offering technology to Gujarat, and Gujarat based companies offering technology to buyers worldwide. Out of about 80 MOUs signed during the INTECHMART, 4 were with Canadian companies in the field of fruit pulp and juice, services related to airfield operations, management and marketing.

(c) It is expected that in the light of the Gujarat INTECHMART, further foreign investment and export possibilities may materialise.

आयात-निर्यात क्षेत्र के कार्यकरण का सरलीकरण

2341. **श्री गोपाल सिंह जी० सोलंकी:** क्या वाणिज्य मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या सरकार आयात-निर्यात के कार्यकरण को और अधिक सरल बनाने के लिए किसी व्यापक विधेयक तैयार करने पर विचार कर रही है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है;

(ग) क्या उक्त विधेयक के प्रारूप को अंतिम रूप दे दिया गया है; और

(घ) इसे संसद में कब तक पुनः स्थापित किए जाने की संभावना है?

वाणिज्य मंत्री (श्री रामकृष्ण हेगड़े): (क) से (घ) जी नहीं। आयात-निर्यात क्षेत्र की कार्यप्रणाली को सरल बनाने के लिए सरकार कोई बिल तैयार नहीं कर रही है। तथापि, निर्यात एवं आयात प्रक्रिया का सरलीकरण एक सतत प्रक्रिया है। सरकार ने भारतीय निर्यातों की प्रतिस्पद्धात्मकता में सुधार करने और संचालनात्मक समय और लागत को कम करने के लिए पहले ही विभिन्न उपाय किए हैं।